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## CIM inmates dive in for a better future

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Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Article Launched: 12/02/2006 12:00:00 AM PST

CHINO - Fourteen prisoners showed off skills used in commercial diving that may help them get a future job during Friday's reopening ceremony for the Marine Technology Training Center at the California Institution for Men.

"When I first got to this prison, I heard about this program," said Richard Rojo, 22, a CIM inmate serving 32 months.

"I had nothing going for me on the streets, and when my counselor told me about (the program) - I said, `Let's do it, I'm all for it.'"

The MTTC was created in 1970 and closed in 2003 due to budget restraints.

But Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's lead in establishing programs to rehabilitate inmates helped to reopen the program at CIM, said James Tilton, secretary of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Warden Mike Poulos told about 100 guests who attended the ceremony that the center will offer new hope for the inmates.

"They can now find a means to earn a new skill," Poulos said.

He said the program has been proven to work as a rehabilitation tool and that of the 55 first-year graduates from 1970, only three ever returned to prison.

About 100 inmates per year can enter the program, which includes an 11-month rotating curriculum training that teaches skills such as diving physics, navigation, welding, marine construction, seamanship, report writing and blueprint reading.

Fred Johnson, program instructor for MTTC, said he has faith in the inmates that they all will graduate and do well.

"Once they graduate from this school, they will have foreman capabilities. I have jobs lined up for each one of them right now," Johnson said.

Aside from commercial diving, he said they will be capable of seeking employment in off-shore drilling.

Charles Pattillo, an executive officer for Prison Industry Authority, which provides inmates jobs, said the program costs about \$350,000 a year to operate, but prison officials said the likely lowered recidivism rate will save money in the long run.

He said there have been nearly 1,800 graduates in the history of the program at CIM.

Inmates must pass a basic math skills test and have between 14 months and four years left in their sentence to participate.

"I thought I was reading German at first," Rojo said. "But we started learning step-by-step, and things started making sense."

Rojo said the course requires a lot of reading, making it mandatory he studies in his cell, because the rest of the day involves physical training and classroom time.

After successful completion of the course, the inmates will receive their commercial diving license.

Rojo plans to go to Louisiana to work in the Gulf of Mexico as soon as he is released next August.

"I couldn't pass up this opportunity," he said. "It's the best opportunity I've ever had."

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